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THE CULTURE OF CONSUMPTION: CRITICAL ESSAYS IN AMERICAN HISTORY, 1880–1980

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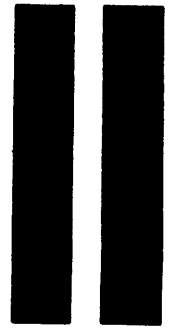
then no longer merely a way of selling goods, it is a true part of the culture of a confused society."[85] My evidence suggests that by the early twentieth century this was already the case in America; and that by the 1920s there was a larger Lost Generation, whose members haunted luncheon club and bedroom suburb as well as bistro and atelier.



THE RHETORIC OF CONSUMPTION

MASS-MARKET MAGAZINES AND THE DEMISE OF THE GENTLE READER, 1880–1920

CHRISTOPHER P. WILSON

Th' first thing ye know there won't be as many pages iv advertisin' as there are iv lithrachoor. Then people will stop readin' magazines. A man don't want to dodge around through almost impenethrable pomes an' reform articles to find a pair iv suspenders or a shavin' soap. Another thing, th' magazines ought to be compelled to mark all lithrachoor plainly so that th' reader can't be deceived.

—Finley Peter Dunne, "Mr. Dooley on the Magazines" (1909)

Page with all his respect for literature . . . is disposed to look upon it chiefly for what it accomplishes and will see in the magazine an instrument rather than a vehicle.

—Diary entry of Horace Scudder, editor, *Atlantic Monthly*, (August 18, 1896)

I

For Victorian Americans of the upper and middle classes, the activity of reading served as a haven of revered cultural values: tradition, restraint, cultivation. It was the archetypically private endeavor in an era when the public realm struck many as impersonal, chaotic, even debilitating. Spiral staircases, formal dining rooms, back entrances—all testified to the prescribed and intricate rituals of daily life; reading parlors and personal libraries, by contrast, were regarded as sanctuaries. As Burton Bledstein writes, the entire experience of reading was, by consensus, internal and contemplative. "Detached from any face-to-face confrontation, apart from any mass audience, oblivious to any restriction of time, the individual alone could read and reread the written work in the privacy of any room. . . . Isolated, the reader required no intermediary as interpreter, no set stage, no responsive listener."[1]

And yet, around the turn of the century, a few commentators detected the beginnings of a transformation in the reading process itself. In a 1900 issue of *The Atlantic*, for example, the one-time minister of Boston's Unitarian First Church, Samuel McChord Crothers, decried an impending demise in the traditionally conceived "gentle reader." In place of gentility, Crothers described a new reading style ascending to cultural supremacy. He noted the disappearance of literary conventions like the dedication and the narrative intrusion in favor of more realistic effects in fiction; he pointed to the passage of admitted prejudice and opinion, displaced by the era's obsession with news, information, and objectivity. He argued, furthermore, that contrary to the supposed personal touch provided by a new "frankness" in print, reading had actually lost some of its intimacy: Printed texts, he said, no longer offered the active yet gentlemanly exchange between reader and author. "I sometimes fear," he wrote, "that reading, in the old-fashioned sense, may become a lost art." Similarly, critic Gerald Stanley Lee described current literature in *The Lost Art of Reading* (1902) as a "headlong, helpless literary rush" which subdivided and fragmented modern readers into mere paragraph skimmers. *Harper's* editor Henry Mills Alden, actively resisting the era's trend toward "timely" articles, said magazines no longer adhered to the liberal arts spirit, but had embraced the specialization of the modern university. Bliss Perry, editor of *The Atlantic*, said "cheerful" magazine reading—which he compared to polite attention to after-dinner speeches—was fast becoming a thing of the past.[2]

In hearkening back to the ideal of companionate readership, these writers alluded to a literary convention with a long history. Its origins went as far back as the classical author's traditional invocation of the Muse or patron—guiding spirits bourgeois society had transformed into the sympathetic soul of the gentle reader. The notion of a reciprocal

reading contract had achieved its most sophisticated expression in the eighteenth-century British novel. Authors like Fielding, Richardson, and Sterne had consciously allowed contemplative "space," and even "resting places" in their narratives, so that the reader could pause, reconsider, and even collaborate in the meaning of the text. Reflecting roots in letter writing, these novels worked in active yet restrained dialogue between writer and reader; the latter was not bowled over with details—with "realism"—which reduced his interpretive input.[3] In America this conception had been resuscitated primarily in the "family house" journals—*Harper's*, *Scribner's*, *The Atlantic*, *The Century*—where the "gentle reader," ostensibly sharing an "implicit understanding" with her editor, symbolized the guiding spirit of Victorianism itself.[4] Fears about her impending demise were a serious matter.

Of course, the turn-of-the-century decades witnessed a whole series of shock waves to the hallowed concept of gentle reading: the sensationalism of the metropolitan tabloid, the frenzy of the "best-seller" system in book publishing, the proliferation of commercial images and slogans, the rise of mass entertainments. Yet the medium most often singled out as responsible for reshaping reading was the "cheap" magazine, which rose to cultural prominence after 1885. The choice was practically unavoidable. During the span of the Progressive era, topical magazines achieved a centrality in American life never duplicated before or since. They were the original home of large-scale national advertising and market research; the primary popular medium within which the "helping professions" and other experts first reached a mass audience; the principal exponents of the ostensibly nonpartisan, "independent" political style promoted by the muckrakers; and, in general, supporters of the "realistic" trend in American letters. Topical magazines were a crucible of modern consumer culture. The furor over the "gentle reader" suggests that this strategic role involved more than the magazines' diffusion of new products, values, and ideas; it also depended on their zeal for the transformation of the reading process itself. They sought to acclimate readers to a new social environment, to "naturalize" that environment by managing the reading experience.[5] By focusing on the reading process I do not mean to discount other factors that contributed to the rise of the magazines: advertising revenues, favorable postage legislation, technological innovations in printing and papermaking, and the broader communications revolution.[6] These developments help account for the potential scope and terrain of the new periodicals. But historians have not yet gone beyond describing those admittedly vital trends to consider the innovations in style, format, and reader participation that contributed directly to the genesis of consumer culture.

This essay will try to illuminate that strategic role by examining

the magazines from three vantage points: first, their roots in the personal backgrounds of a new managerial elite in magazine editing; second, the institution by that elite of a new "anticipatory" design in magazine production; finally, the implementation of this design in four pathbreaking magazines—*McClure's*, *The World's Work*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, and the *Ladies' Home Journal*.[7] My thesis is that the change in the reading process derived essentially, although not exclusively, from a "consumerist" reorientation implemented by a group of men well versed in the verbal, communicative, and organizational skills of a sales economy; that these skills changed magazines not only at the level of production, but in the very "voice" they conveyed; and finally, that these editors' penchant for "anticipatory" production resulted in design strategies and narrative devices that attempted to streamline and manage the reading process itself. In each magazine editors orchestrated a mode of "realism"—in different variations of authority, factuality, intimacy, and common sense—which created an aura of legitimacy around their offerings.[8] Under the banner of this "realism," the magazine became a primary American institution by which a consumer rhetoric, confined originally to the service or sales economy, penetrated other spheres of American life—politics, contemporary affairs, even family life.

I choose the word "rhetoric" rather than "ideology" or "structure of feeling" because I am primarily intent upon describing a mode of language (in its broadest sense), a way of discussing and seeing that embraces diction, tone of voice, and narrative design. Furthermore, my analysis is necessarily tethered to the editorial end of the communication process, and to an "immanent" critique of editors' goals and magazine formats. No analysis can entirely reconstruct the reading experience of Americans eight decades after the fact. We cannot account fully for readers' prior expectations or competing environments; nor can we assume that readers adopted editorial wisdom uncritically. But attention to the origins and intentions of the new magazines can begin to "flesh out" the particular historical relationship between ascending managerial elites and the shape and texture of consumer culture in one of its pivotal institutions.[9] By exploring the naturalizing process, we can begin to understand some of the contradictions of that emergent culture: how, in the magazines, the passivity of political spectatorship came to seem like active citizenship; how the hierarchies and power gaps of modern corporate life came to seem like a classless country town; how efficient buying became the chief calling of domestic responsibility.

The managerial incursion into editing had significant consequences for the production, voice, and format of modern magazines. But it is not my intent to portray the outcome of the naturalizing quest

as an unqualified success. Mushrooming circulations may have been attributable not only to the magazines' new agenda, but also to the way they fed upon the passivity, anxiety, and dependence for which they themselves were partly responsible. The new "pitch" cannot be taken at face value. The reader was coaxed to exchange idle fancy for a vigorous embrace of "real life"; to forgo his affection for the past in favor of staying informed on current events; to sacrifice his private thoughts and cooperate in a new program of "frank" exchanges with editors. Yet in many instances the magazines' version of real life bore little or no relation to the readers' own; their professed objectivity was often only a carefully managed credibility; their intimate confidences, at times, a patronizing facade. The "realism" the magazines offered was a particularly spurious variety—a world of illusory power and participation that masked delimited options and prefabricated responses. Such misleading packaging was unavoidable in a "naturalizing" that was founded in a rhetoric of illusion.

II

Although the leaps and bounds of magazine circulation during these years are now commonplace items in textbook histories, to date we still know very little about the new magazine audiences. Gilded Age journals carefully guarded their subscription figures and lists; Progressive era periodicals exaggerated theirs. The sparse data that do exist come mostly from the pioneering forays into market research done by Curtis Publishing, the firm responsible for the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Ladies' Home Journal*.[10] Existing fragments suggest that the new magazines continued to reach for the northeastern elites that had been the mainstay of Gilded Age audiences; they also targeted families of slightly lower income levels. The magazines remained firmly rooted in the middle class. Much of their circulation growth seems to have come from new regional elites, largely in cities with populations over 10,000. When the Lynds surveyed Muncie, Indiana, in 1924, aggregate circulation for the *Post* and the *Journal* was roughly sixty times that of older magazines like *Harper's* and *The Century*.[11]

In part, the newer magazines may have spoken to a Middletown audience because they were themselves the product of "outsiders" to the northeastern literary elite that had dominated periodical publishing for decades. With a few notable exceptions, since the Civil War the world of magazine editing had been centered in the established gentry of Boston and New York. The profession retained residual elements of

amateurism and patronage, and though remunerative enough, echoed the temper of a gentleman's voluntary association. Editors adhered to an Arnoldian view of their craft—to offer culture as an alternative to anarchy. But after the mid-1880s, the editing profession seemed to follow a pattern established earlier in metropolitan journalism, and repeated later in the film industry: a period of relative accessibility to recent immigrants and outsiders, if still principally male, white, and Northern European. Edward Bok and S. S. McClure, for example, were first-generation immigrants (Dutch and Irish respectively); Walter Hines Page of *The World's Work* was a Southerner; George Horace Lorimer of the *Post* was a Midwesterner, and second-generation Scotch-Irish.[12] As with the immigrant entrepreneurs of nickelodeon houses, amusement halls, and filmmaking, the outsider status seemed particularly adaptable to cultural media that were intrinsically vicarious and voyeuristic in design—that worked, in short, in the mode of emulation. The new magazines typically reflected the viewpoint of men "outside looking in" on power and status—in gossip columns, in celebrity profiles, even in muckraking. The outsider status also contributed to the new editors' paradoxical mixture of rebellion and accommodation vis-à-vis bourgeois values. On the one hand, the critical distance of these new figures from Brahmin culture was reflected in their impatience with the ideal of "cultivation" and the "feminization" of literary taste. On the other hand, the fact that these new men were outsiders to literary culture also meant that their initial training had come more directly than their predecessors' from the commercial mainstream. The new editors felt greater affinities for the "masses," for realms beyond Boston and New York, for more mundane, nonintellectual activities—and for business itself. They rehabilitated genteel culture by infusing it with managerial skills and work values.

During the Gilded Age, when periodicals had been based mainly on subscription income rather than advertising revenue, and primarily directed at northeastern, well-to-do family circles, editing had been thought of as a task of mutual cooperation and cultivation among editors, contributors, and audiences. The working model was the professional-client relationship. Often writers of imaginative literature, editors thought of themselves mainly as literary men, whose job it was to sift, scrutinize, and select literary manuscripts, always watching over established boundaries of taste and propriety. To this paternalism most of the ills of these older magazines—prudishness, eccentricity, elitism—can be traced. But even the well-deserved notoriety of Gilder et al. for censoring manuscripts tells us much about their editorial role: It reveals that *editing*, in the literal sense, is what these men thought their job to be.[13]

This ideal of editing was based in an office system of relatively

undifferentiated assignments or tasks, contributions that arrived unsolicited, and a pace set by the demands of careful reading. In cramped offices cherished for their distance from the "bustle" of downtown, with limited staffs and modest revenue, there was little room, opportunity, or desire for the internal division of labor. Editorial roles at *Scribner's* and *The Century*, for instance, were deliberately overlapped or left undefined so as to avoid specialization and needless hierarchy. Even forty years after the fact, L. Frank Tooker, who made a career at *The Century*, recalled his initial surprise in finding tasks shared on a random basis rather than having been parceled out in any systematic fashion. Both the moderate pace and shared tasks reflected, as well, the system of voluntary submissions rather than commissioned articles. Articles were not "drummed up" in elaborately planned promotional schemes with specific time lines; they came in irregularly. In fact, older editors had taken pride in the fact that they did not solicit content—in effect, that writers came to them. Editors generally hesitated about contracting for pieces yet unwritten, for fear that the final product might violate standard canons of taste and prudery. Horace Scudder of *The Atlantic* boasted about never having invited a submission; Robert Underwood Johnson of *The Century* compared commissioning to putting one's head in a noose.[14]

The editorial voice, in turn, reflected this relatively passive notion of editing. During these years, what Bliss Perry and others called the "tolerably short," carefully phrased, virtually anonymous editorial manner reflected a professional conception of editing that valued its restraint, its very avoidance of salesmanlike "pep." Looking for a word to describe this tone, Johnson chose "genuine." There was, he said, no "straining after effect," no "simulated robustness," none of the cocksureness of "made to pattern" writing; the primary mood was one of "grace and serenity." Writers commonly adhered to the older convention of leaving articles unsigned; regular columns were penned from the "Editor's Study" or the "Editor's Easy Chair." Recalling the analogy Perry made about the ideal reading mood, partisans and satirists alike termed the Gilded Age style a "toastmaster" voice or "the rule of the dinner table." These conventions seemed anachronistic and inefficient to the new editor-publishers. In a few decades they transformed the profession into what David Riesman terms an "other-directed," aggressive practice, marked by transatlantic searches for authors and ideas, office rationalization, and a change in the editorial voice. As *The Independent* observed, "The modern editor does not sit in his easy chair, writing essays and sorting over the manuscripts that are sent in by contributors. He goes hunting for things." Abandoning the genteel "we," McClure intoned: "I never got ideas sitting still."[15]

The biographical profiles of the new editors reveal some important

common denominators. All of these men looked fondly back upon training in practical fields that emphasized communicative, managerial, and interpersonal skills. For instance, many of them—Bok, Lorimer, Page, and most of McClure's staff—had apprenticed in daily journalism. The new editors clearly imported to magazines an orientation toward the "news" commodity, which displaced literary content in favor of "timely," topical items of practical affairs; editors also transplanted office efficiency techniques, particularly the new "assignment system." Newspapers also provided models of format by which the reader's eye was attracted and held by headlines, subheads, and photographs. Journalism experience also bred a liking for brief, almost blunt colloquial prose.[16] The principal beneficiary of this training was Page, who liked to tell writers that the creation of the world had been told in a single paragraph; one of his subordinates called *The World's Work* a "glorified monthly newspaper." Later Page followed a traditional route for journalists: He became a diplomat, another job emphasizing verbal and interpersonal skills.[17]

Although other occupational training grounds varied considerably, these editors all exhibited a fascination for the efficient manipulation of space, words, and audience. Bok began as an autograph hunter who designed his own "authorized" collection of photographs with printed biographies on the reverse side of each portrait. Later, he worked in telegraphy, and even became a stenographer for Jay Gould. Then, while doing stenography, promotion, and part-time editing for *Scribner's*, he became a devoted fan of Henry Ward Beecher, from whom Bok said he learned the value of "shorter sermons" loaded with "practical facts." He then developed his fascination for celebrity-hunting into a profession by becoming one of this country's first literary syndicators. Meanwhile, he undertook writing advertisements and a syndicated column of literary gossip. Both enterprises eventually drew him to Cyrus Curtis. McClure solicited ads for a newspaper at Knox College, where he gave a graduation speech on "Enthusiasm" which, he proudly noted, lasted only five minutes. Later, he learned shorthand in business college, and apprenticed at *The Wheelman*, a Pope Bicycle Company publication that later merged with *The Outing*. In the 1880s he developed his magazine along syndicate lines after the idea had been rejected by *The Century*. But in his autobiography (1914), McClure said he developed his true editorial instincts during one summer of college, when he worked as a country peddler. Similarly, Lorimer (the son of an actor turned minister) apprenticed in telegraphy and stenography, worked in journalism, but spent his most important years as a traveling salesman for P. D. Armour, one of his father's parishioners. Armour and Company was a staging area of early impression management: P.D. himself emphasized the importance of public speaking, a lesson lost

neither on Lorimer nor on another employee, Dale Carnegie. In sum, all these men brought to magazines a fascination for skills of management, voice, and personal impressions—skills that emphasized the importance of sounding an audience's needs, creating a relaxed setting, and then delivering a product or idea.[18]

The trademark of this new elite was the rapprochement it effected between the business and editorial sides of magazine publishing. The essence of the change, as *The Independent* described it, was to apply "scientific management" to the magazine. Articles would be well planned, boiled down to readable formats, and consist of "what is most important to be known of what the world is doing and thinking."[19] The new editors' penchant for advance scouting itself necessitated new organizational techniques back at the office. The new elite soon began wholesale bidding for authors, article commissioning, and finally the formation of internal magazine writing staffs. This acceleration involved a basic restructuring of article publication. As the journalist Mark Sullivan remembered it, while "the older magazines . . . were still following the placid paths of the past, selecting from the daily batch of manuscripts voluntarily submitted," periodicals like *McClure's*—more efficient and armed with better finances from advertising revenue—were actually "originating ideas, sending out not one man but half a dozen to get the material." The initiation of Charles Hanson Towne, who began at John Brisben Walker's new *Cosmopolitan*, reversed that of Frank Tooker. Towne remembered expecting to sit quietly at desks sifting manuscripts. He soon learned that editing had become a matter of "extract[ing] ideas from authors," a "looking ahead profession if there ever was one; a constant feeling of the public's pulse." Lorimer put it more bluntly: Magazine publishing, he said, was "the business of buying and selling brains; of having ideas, and finding men to carry them out."[20]

Editors, of course, had not suddenly become prophets. Rather, it was a matter of making the production process more predictable at both ends. At one end, editors wrested inspiration away from unpredictable voluntary contributors and placed it within the magazine office system itself. At the other, editors covered their bets with readers by carefully designed promotion. Thus rather than actually forecasting, what the new editors relied upon was a form of controlled response. This restructuring of production enabled editors to implement many of their own ideas, and more to the point, to generate a "trademark" style.

This reorientation had several other effects. First, it compounded the turn to "timely" articles that became the dominant trend in magazines; careful planning and promotion were what *made* an issue or article timely.[21] Likewise anticipatory production contributed to an increased emphasis on celebrities, experts, and established writers, both

by intent and by the fact that commissioning numerically reduced the chances of unknowns.[22] But the principal effect of the system was its reinforcement of a "robust," direct magazine voice. The reduction of magazine content to an "idea" that could be "farmed out" to a writer, and then "gotten across" to a reader, only enhanced these editors' bias against a sophisticated or allusive literary style. Page, Munsey, Bok, McClure, Lorimer, and several other key editors all agreed, as McClure put it, that the "decoration of phrase is a very secondary matter," that an author "can say the same thing in fifty different ways."[23]

These editors valued a style that did not obscure the assigned "idea"—a simple, direct, persuasive style akin to everyday speech. Arguing that "the message itself is of greater import than the manner in which it is said," Bok said a "readable, lucid style is far preferable to what is called a 'literary style'—a foolish phrase, since it often means nothing except a complicated method of expression." Page, the champion of what he termed a "homely realism," said that though "the somewhat leisurely style of a generation or two ago pleased the small circle of readers within its reach," modern conditions demanded writing with "more directness, more clearness, with greater nervous force." ("Women can't write editorials," he once explained to Horace Scudder; "neither can feminine men.") Thinking good writing "as common as clam shells," Frank Munsey said he wanted *stories*, "not washed out studies of effete human nature." The principal effect, he said, was that writing should get a grip on the reader.[24]

Written words, to put it another way, were valued in direct proportion to their clarity, "strength," and above all, their ability to persuade, to cut through the reader's barriers of resistance and "impose" an idea. The salesman slant made literary style into a "pitch" that attempted to encircle the reader with a mood that would lead him to relax his defenses.[25] In this respect, what editors sought was a modified form of "realistic" discourse that attempted to convey authority, authenticity, or expertise. The importation of a direct, forceful prose style was the first step in the managerial "naturalization" of content; it was done by conveying the glow of conviction.

It could also work by conveying personability and commonsensicality—what Dale Carnegie or Bruce Barton were wont to call, in a misnomer, "sincerity."[26] In this variation, editors attempted to personalize the voice of the editor, to erase the conventional tone of anonymity upon which Gilded Age editors had relied. Referring proudly to his own point of entry, Bok said, "The method of editorial expression in the magazines of 1889 was also distinctly vague and prohibitively impersonal. The public knew the name of scarcely a single editor of a magazine: there was no personality that stood out in the mind: the accepted editorial expression was the indefinite 'we'; no one ventured

to use the first person singular and talk intimately to the reader." Clearly, "the time had come . . . for the editor of some magazine to project his personality through the printed page and to convince the public that he was not an oracle removed from the people, but a real human being who could talk and not merely write on paper." Even though Bok couched his memory in democratic and humane terms, he really saw his personality as a "projection," a manipulated mask "convincing" the reader as if he or she were a buyer. Even Bok's autobiography used a third-person narrative, because he actually thought of "Edward Bok" as a different person. In this light it is not surprising that Bok also said that he had been more honestly attracted to the "science of advertisement writing, which meant . . . the capacity to say much in little space," than to his literary assignments.[27]

Nor is it shocking that *The Nation* ridiculed his despair of "attaining so high an ideal" as bringing his articles up to the level of his ads. "We hasten to add," the editors wrote wryly, "that the editorial policy of nearly all the magazines we know is happily approximating the advertising policy. In a superb miscellaneousness, in timeliness, in direct and vociferous appeal to the reader, the editors are, after all, not lagging so much behind."[28] To *The Nation*, or to Peter Finley Dunne, there was little doubt that a prose style that tried to "get a grip on the reader," to cut through his or her resistances with a direct and personalized voice, was a style bred in the commercial mainstream. *Bookman* analyst Algernon Tassin pinpointed the mode when he termed it a kind of "buttonholing," the very quality Roland Barthes singles out as a "naturalizing" dimension of modern consumer mythology. This was the change in the reading experience that so troubled the likes of Crothers, Perry, and Johnson: a "made to pattern" form of "realism" full of pep and information, but which actually threatened to limit the intellectual latitude the reader enjoyed. But the design of the editorial voice was only part of a larger plan by the new elite: to create specialized reading environments that began to anticipate, direct, and solicit readers' expectations in order to market controlled choices. As Tassin put it in reference to Bok, the new editor did not go forth to the family circle: He inscribed a circle around himself, and invited the reader in.[29]

III

That four such different periodicals—a newsmagazine, a muckraking monthly, a businessman's weekly, and a woman's domestic journal—united around this new plan is itself testimony to the pervasiveness of

the new consumer rhetoric. These magazines varied considerably in content, format, and political ideology. Neither *The World's Work* nor *McClure's*, for instance, ran much advertising; while in the Curtis publications, advertising ran over 25 percent of content. Moreover, not all the features of the new "cheap" magazines were clear departures from earlier Gilded Age guidelines. McClure had worked at *The Century*, Bok at *Scribner's*, Page at *The Forum* and *The Atlantic*. Page and McClure's sheets especially showed ties to the traditional form of the miscellany; *McClure's* even ran reproductions of art works in its early years, hearkening back to the traditional role of the magazine as a vehicle of culture.[30] But for all their differences, these magazines shared a fundamental desire: to make their content more "practical," worldly, and up-to-date. A magazine succeeded, Bok said in retrospect, when it ceased to be "an inanimate printed thing" and became "a vital need in the personal lives of its readers."[31]

Page once penned a summary of *The World's Work*'s goals that, with minor variations, outlined the major objective of the new topical magazines:

> . . . the earnest purpose to interpret the important things that are done . . . to make an interesting magazine that should have a higher aim than to fill an idle hour, and a more original aim that to thresh over the old straw and call the chaff "Literature," or to publish the commonplaces that men in official positions dictate in their decline for cash. For the most important things and the most interesting things are the very tasks that men now have in hand—men who do something and love their work—Social Problems that directly affect human well-being; Education in its wider reach and more effective methods; Political Duties that are imminent and real; Literature that has substance as well as form and that takes hold on modern life; Invention and Industry in all their advances; Agriculture . . . whatever men do better than men have done before.[32]

Both the style and substance of Page's summary were revealing here. With an encyclopedic and fervent tone, Page listed the trends that inverted the priorities of the Gilded Age: a turning away from "literature" to timely topics; a tendency toward an "interpretive" rather than simply a selective editorial role; and a bias toward the romance of business, professions, technology, and politics. Like the Luce publications in later years, *The World's Work* (as its title suggested) was an international digest drenched in the romance of progress.[33]

The general trend toward the coverage of business, professions, and politics was an attempt to court more male readers (and voters). Page outlined his ideal as a "cultivated man in an industrial era," still well-bred, but now business-minded and democratic in sympathy, ready to adapt to the new conditions—trusts, unions, international

trade—outlined by the magazine. *McClure's*, although it also ran fiction, announced it wanted to reach a greater mass of readers by providing the latest scientific advancements and "a moving, living transcript of the intelligent, interesting, human endeavor of the time." *McClure's* felt that the very "vitality of democracy" lay upon the "popular knowledge of complex questions."[34]

This fascination for the "romance of real life" carried over into many features. In *McClure's*, its presence was felt in the regularly appearing celebrity profiles, popular science features, and even muckraking articles. In each case a common motif recurred—what Neil Harris terms the "Operational Aesthetic," long a basic element of nineteenth-century popular culture and entertainment. McClure, no doubt drawing upon his peddler days, always exuded a whiff of Barnum: Commonly working in concealment and display, his magazine often endowed the mundane with thrills and chills ("Adventures with the Leaping Tuna: The Skill and Endurance Required to Catch the Tiger of the Sea"). But also like Barnum, the magazine recognized the curiosity value of showing the audience *how something was done*—whether it was training dangerous animals, switching trains in a railyard, or bribing a legislature. The motif was not restricted to spectacular activities. In fact, the magazine just as often showed the reader that seemingly complex activities involved operations similar to those within his own experience. This reversible strategy carried over even into biographical pieces. Lives could either be exposed as common clay or endowed with the "romance of industrial achievement"—valued for success, or because "side by side with the stirring story . . . there runs . . . the accompaniment of a sunny, personal life, of devotion to friends and family." This was a motif that appeared again and again in the new magazines: a convertible strategy of exposure that allowed editors to glamorize the mundane world of work and yet also humanize the celebrity.[35]

Of all the magazines that expressed this fascination for the "ins and outs" of practical life and business, Lorimer's *Post* was in a class by itself. Merging "seriousness" with a middle-class notion of "sanity," it aimed at the clean-living, law-abiding, safe breadwinner—the office worker, the small businessman, and the limited investor. In line with this pitch, the *Post* allowed no liquor advertising, no real estate ads, and no financial ads. Lorimer the editor—who had lost his place with Armour due to an ill-advised venture—spoke out against speculation and financiers. "Men who stay rich and grow old gracefully," he warned, "are not the gamblers of the stock markets and the grain pits"; "successful money-getting calls for soberness of living and evenness of mentality." In these years, a *Post* series entitled "Your Savings" was the magazine's longest-running feature. Lorimer never swayed from his

feeling that there was "no finer product of modern civilization than the American businessman." When told in 1926 that his magazine was starting to attract "thoughtful" readers, Lorimer quipped that he would try to correct the error. He even set out on a talent search to find writers who would write business fiction appropriate to the values of achievement in American life. The most famous feature in this mode was his own best-seller, "Letters from a Self-Made Merchant to His Son," which ran originally in the *Post*.[36]

If Page and McClure were in the business of "interpretation," Lorimer's forte was gossip and advice. Practically blind to what Max Weber saw as the "iron cage" of modern bureaucracy, the upbeat *Post* insisted that "given moderate ability and fair health—the endowment of the average man—and any youth with good staying powers may still work through to the fore." The magazine would run series like "The Making of a Railroad Man," an account written by employees on every step of the corporate ladder. In a column called "Poor Richard Junior's Philosophy," Lorimer crafted his own aphorisms of successful office politics. Promotional material for Curtis also pointed with pride to the trademark *Post* biographies, which took lessons from "an actual record of life" far superior to "deliberate and deadly" advice of the past. Practical advice for the reader was couched in realistic narrative.[37]

The *Post* also capitalized on the reader's interest by longing looks at celebrities in regular features like "Men and Women of the Hour," "Publick Occurrences," and its most prominent section, "Who's Who and Why—Serious and Frivolous Facts about the Great and Near Great." As this final title indicates, the *Post*, like *McClure's*, realized the endless possibilities of interchangeably glamorizing and humanizing. The overall intention was to bring the well-known figure off either the pedestal of adulation or the cross of infamy. "Even in politics it [the *Post*] opened up a rich field, hitherto unsuspected," Curtis Publishing claimed. "Everybody with an 'honorable' prefixed to his name had been regarded either as a saint or sinner. The *Post* argued that he was a human being, made of the same sort of dust as the doctor or village blacksmith." The small-town faith in the common denominator of "humanity" gave the *Post* a homogenized feel for which it became famous.[38]

Despite the general trend toward "male" readership, the new emphasis on practicality and work was nowhere more striking than in magazines with primarily female audiences. The *Ladies' Home Journal*, like its big brother The *Post*, seemed to deny its modernity, reassuringly linking its reader to the familiar motifs of Sarah Hale's *Godey's Ladies' Book*. Like *Godey's*, the *Journal* at times seemed a thing of ladies, doctors, and ministers (the triumvirate of "feminized" Victorianism), running fashion plates, poetry, fiction, and editorial chitchat. But in fact

the *Journal* departed significantly from the sentimental ethical basis of Victorian ideology. Whereas Hale had appealed to the "thousands of fair and gentle readers" to use their "moral power" in the "holier vocation" of prompting goodness and "purity" in their husbands—and advised that "the elevation of the sex will not consist of becoming like men"—the *Journal*, conversely, deemphasized the importance of literary cultivation in favor of domestic efficiency and civic activity. The way to lead women to the appreciation of beauty, Bok told one writer, was "not to print an essay by Ruskin but to tell them how many packages of flower-seeds you can buy for fifteen cents, and print a diagram of how to plant them." Bok also waged a private war against the old-style "self-culture" of women's clubs.[39]

The magazine was conceived in a marriage quite like the one it advocated. Originally, the *Journal* (first called the *Ladies' Journal and Practical Housekeeper*) was the brainchild of advertising innovator and publisher Cyrus Curtis and his wife, the former Louisa Knapp. While Mr. Curtis, in private business meetings, seemed to belittle editorial goals in favor of advertising objectives, Mrs. Curtis spoke of the magazine as a household adviser, offering domestic fiction, "Side Talks with Girls," "Everything About the House," "Hints on Home Dressmaking," "Floral Helps and Hints," and the like. "We propose to make it [the *Journal*] a household necessity," she wrote, "so good, so pure, so true, so brave, so full, so complete, that a young couple will no more think of going to housekeeping without it than without a cook stove." The goals of publisher-husband and adviser-wife went hand in hand. For instance, when the magazine secured a story from Marian Harland, a popular writer of domestic fiction, Cyrus financed it by securing an ad from an eggbeater manufacturer who admired her work. Cyrus knew that advertisers sought a magazine that would be used by the practical homemaker regularly, just as, it was hoped, products would be.[40]

Mrs. Curtis offered the *Journal* as a "regular visitor, entertaining, practical and helpful." She was convinced that what the world needed was "fewer wasp-waisted women" and more efficient homemakers. Traditional interests like dress or etiquette were always put to the acid test of utility. Curtis's ideal reader was a woman who rolled up her sleeves, trained her young daughters in practical affairs, and became a successful house manager. "No woman is educated," she wrote, "who is not equal to the successful management of a family." Bok continued this theme, adding his own emphasis on the value of common sense. He argued for simple, "sensible" dress; for "system in shopping"; for young girls to learn "application"; and for a wife to be as conversant with money as her husband. Summing up the new accent, feature writer Octave Thanet advised readers to accept their role as the "bread of

existence" rather than *Godey's* "elixir" of reform—in other words, to be their husband's aide-de-camp rather than his moral inspiration. Bok likewise said he aimed his magazine at a woman who "did things"; sense was something men liked in their wives, if not, it was noted rather dryly, in their sweethearts.[41]

The ethos of managerialism reoriented magazine fare to "practical," work-oriented, and "timely" issues; the magazines, in turn, offered themselves as manuals in how citizenship, occupational life, and domesticity could be better "managed." But what was also different about these magazines was the way this advice was conveyed. In part it was their new "realistic" voice—colloquial, forceful, direct, and seemingly personal. But the magazines also employed "realism" in a broader sense: in design strategies and narrative devices designed to enhance the aura of authenticity by exerting greater influence over the reading process. Page recognized that a reader's tendency was to wander; *McClure's* implicitly acknowledged that a reader might be alienated by political stands; Bok and Lorimer were remarkably cognizant of readers' tendency to simply read a magazine and throw it away. In other words, editors intuitively recognized that to succeed fully the magazine had to generate trust, a sense of participation, and even proprietorship in the mind of the reader. This was best accomplished by a careful balance of the new and familiar that both stimulated the reader's attention yet reassured him—the lure of "new improved," the stability of product loyalty. A reader must come to look for something "fresh" (though pre-promoted) in each issue, yet he must also recognize the stamp of familiarity in his "favorite" magazine. Bok put this formulation in a characteristic analogy. "A successful magazine," he said, "is exactly like a successful store: It must keep its wares constantly fresh and varied to attract the eye and hold the patronage of the customers."[42]

At one level, designing of this kind derived from the new managerial style, in which the editor sought out writers and promoted their material in advance. Readers' expectations were thus set not only per issue, but also months ahead of delivery. But "anticipatory" production also surfaced in new design mechanisms of format and editorial presence that attempted to control reader response. Page, for instance—an advocate of scientific management in other realms—compared the editor to an "engineer" who, although he could not directly control the machinery he created, still set the magazine pace and direction. "His position," Page wrote, "is very much like the position of the locomotive engineer, he does not make the machine, but only guides it, he cannot make it go on any track except the track which was originally designed for it."[43] What Page implied here was that design was fundamental, and that the editor may *appear* "impersonal" and detached but, in effect,

has already laid out the track the periodical will follow. Admitting that no journal could cover daily events like a newspaper, Page said once the editor was

> spiritually baptized he has the discernment to see what sort of literature makes for progress and what does not, and his function is something like this: civilization goes forward always in a zig-zag course; it is never a uniform line of advance like a line of soldiers. . . . The magazine's duty is to take the foremost line, the foremost column and to put itself a little ahead of that and thus to invite its readers to a little broader vista so that men will see what is bound to come and it will inspire him to work to bring it to pass.[44]

Page's mixing of metaphors was especially revealing here. The editor, through his experience, acquires discernment which *allows him* to decide what literature "makes for progress"; his "column" ("inviting" in tone) puts itself ahead of the reader and convinces him to jump aboard a process that has already been portrayed as practically "inevitable."

Page built this desire to lead into the structure of his magazine. Whereas most Gilded Age journals had commonly placed editorial columns in the back pages, mixed in with letters, and often initiating new (or unrelated) topics of their own, *The World's Work* began with Page's own "March of Events." The effect of this "advance column" was to provide journalistic "lead-ins" to subsequent articles. Page not only influenced readers' expectations, he in effect sanctioned the veracity of the informative articles that followed by making them seem part of the "march" of progress itself.

Page's editorial "interpretation" thus provided an intervening lens between the reader and the material that followed. Page's principle of masculine prose also added substantially to the feeling of credibility. Although he approached issues rhetorically as "questions" or "problems," in fact he provided answers and opinions, in an authoritative tone he liked to call "profound earnestness."[45] This is supposedly why editorials, as he had said, could not be left to women: The soft sell of feminine "influence" would no longer do. Page's mode was "informative" rather than explicitly investigative. As his biographer John Milton Cooper observes, the magazine "sustained the impression in readers' minds that [*The*] *World's Work* was viewing events just the way they would if they were better informed." Rather than citing statistics, Page and his writers tended to bracket their opinions with knowing nods to "considerable or respectable body of opinion," "practical men who have long studied the problem," and so forth. In articles describing professions, the reader was not told how to do something—but he was shown how it was "intelligently" done.[46]

Page's main claim to authenticity was driven home further by

printed photographs. In these early years, photographic reproductions probably had an element of irrefutability, and they shifted the journal's priorities further in Page's desired direction. By definition, photographs reinforced the shifting of content to things of the present. Moreover, photographs seemed perpetually to "up the ante" as to what, in the magazine's view, constituted "real life." As with *Life* magazine years later, readers came to expect not analytical photographs so much as those that offered new sights, new vistas, deeper looks into the March of Progress. Photos enabled editors like Page not only to define what was real, practical, or inevitable, but to endow his interpretation with an aura of romance and authority.

In contrast to *The World's Work*, *McClure's* lacked a visible editorial persona. But the muckraking journal also appealed to the reader's thirst for information—indeed, his sense of loss without it—by marketing its own variety of realism. In *McClure's*, the analog to Page's pitch of authority was an often "scientific" authenticity. For example, one of McClure's fondest memories was the "Human Document" series, which traced celebrities' lives through photo galleries (suggestively like a family album), and the "Real Conversation" series, which consisted of essentially modern interviews. In the Gilded Age, articles for the most part had existed in isolation; now they interlocked with actual "documents." Taking the traditional path through a celebrity's day—his habits, home, and personal library—*McClure's* gave it "realism" by emphasizing the element of photographic tangibility and real conversation. The relative novelty of the interview device was no better suggested than by the recurrent bafflement of the celebrities themselves. Even in these profiles, an element of the muckraking strategy can be detected—or perhaps muckraking's affinities with celebrity gossip. In either case, *McClure's* persuaded the reader that it had the "inside dope."[47]

The power of this appeal to "inside" authenticity became obvious when the magazine did, in time, turn to politics and social issues. "Before conditions can be cured they must be understood," the editors wrote in an introduction to a series on criminality:

> . . . but the service does not stop there; the lukewarmness of the righteous is the stronghold of corruption, and about these reports there is something startling—a frankness, a closeness of contact like experience, a vital human picturesqueness, that makes abstractions real; and so they are calculated to win the readers that scorn preachments. . . .
>
> That vital human picturesqueness has, too, a value apart from all its contingent immediate political significance. Here are human documents among the most curious ever brought forth; and even if we got all our cities cleaned up to the point of admiration, here would be good reading for all who

delight in human nature and the contrarieties of the human scene for their own sake.[48]

Here the editors drew upon the expectations set by "Human Documents," making a claim Barnumesque in style ("among the most curious ever brought forth"). But also implicit in this introduction were two central editorial precepts about exposure. First, the "design" of the article's "frankness" is to startle the reader and raise his curiosity; second, "vital human picturesqueness" could often cover the risk of controversial political analysis. Realism served the dual purpose of attracting new readers and keeping old ones by basing its appeal not in politics but in style.

The "closeness of contact like experience" could be achieved in several ways. *McClure's* articles commonly combined an almost detective-like factuality with photographic reproductions. In Lincoln Steffens's "Shame of the Cities" series, the magazine printed actual city ledgers. Likewise, Ray Stannard Baker wrote in his portrait of Kaiser Wilhelm that the American visitor to Germany would "discover that his imagination in picturing the Kaiser had followed the exaggerations of the caricaturist rather than the sober reality of the photograph" (which, of course, appeared on the opposite page). In other instances, authenticity was acquired by printing either an "authorized" account or the wisdom of a well-known expert.[49]

Outside work could be both costly and unpredictable, however. A staff system such as McClure created, on the other hand, could control costs and meet deadlines. But to retain the feel of expertise, the staff attempted to evolve a professional style or manner within articles. In the case of Steffens and William Allen White, for example, investigative realism imported the aura of popular science. Whereas Page conveyed the authority of those "in the know," *McClure's* often sought irrefutability through the feel of scientific documentation. Once again, the appeal of "Human Documents," popular science, and muckraking all overlapped in a promise to show, with "facts," how things were really done—how they operated.[50]

Realism, however, could come in a variety of guises. At Lorimer's *Post*, the variety aimed for was one of "common sense" rather than informed opinion or scientific objectivity. Lorimer's *Post* essentially inherited the tenor of gossip that enhanced the comforting feel of its pages. Lorimer's "Who's Who" feature, for example, regularly contained a "Hall of Fame" subsection, within which the *Post* revealed who played golf with whom in the capital, a particular personality's nickname or habits (e.g., "Friends of Admiral Dewey says he's the best-dressed man in Washington"), and the like. Other regular features like "In the Bookshop," or even the fillers used to adjust column space,

often contained aphorisms balanced with anecdotes of humorously trivial import. Lorimer hardly apologized for this fascination with gossip for its own sake; on the contrary, he defended it as a form of popular literature. "Gossip is the ordinary man or woman's chief literary amusement," he said. "What people are, what they have done, what they are doing or going to do—that is the prime interest of every normal being."[51] The claim of "normality" justified the *Post's* gossip on the grounds that it was both entertaining and "inside dope." It was also the *Post's* equivalent of *McClure's* "vital picturesqueness" in a lower key: Readers potentially alienated by opinion would be held by the charming contrarieties and eccentricities of (in a title later prominent) "people." Even as it glamorized it trivialized: Gaps of power and privilege were glossed over with a view of society as a "mass of humanity," a classless, commonsensical place akin to a country town. Even forty years later, the *Post* had a backwater feel.

Finally, in the other Curtis house periodical, the *Ladies' Home Journal*, "realism" appeared in the form of helpful, intimate "confidences" between the reader and the magazine. Like other varieties of inside dope, the *Journal's* appeal was based in a sense of authenticity—but more to the point, of "being inside," of belonging. Curtis Publishing's promotion drew the crucial connection. "The final tests of a magazine's excuse for existence," it wrote, "are the confidence which its readers accord it, and the confidences they bring to it." The *Journal* not only carried a good many pieces about what it called its own "family" of authors, but also printed reams of letters from readers, who wrote in to various columns and editors with questions, opinions, and advice. This latter strategy, a *Journal* trademark, had several functions. First, it both enlarged and assured the continuity of readership, a strategy that was essential to the building of large circulations. Second, the letters provided the germ of market research; often Bok polled readers before taking an editorial stand. Third, and most important, letters enhanced what Bok liked to call the "sense of proprietorship" a reader felt in the magazine. Bok likened his readership to a plebiscite, as policy was presumably given a mandate if circulation rose. Letters gauged reader response and helped plan future content; replies reinforced the magazine's "intimacy" and advisory role. The *Journal* kept a full-time staff just answering letters. These institutional strategies created the opening for the gossip-like intimacy Bok claimed to create with his editorial persona. "I want you to look upon us," he wrote, "as if we actually came in person to your home. . . . And just as you would talk to us if we were in your home, tell us when we fail to meet some want in your daily life."[52]

Once again, Bok's editorial goals complemented those of Cyrus Curtis. A corollary of being "practical," as far as the *Journal* was con-

cerned, was careful scrutiny of the marketplace of goods. Mrs. Curtis thus inaugurated a program that encouraged her readers actually to *read* the magazine's ads. The "way we would have it," she wrote, was if readers read the "paper clear through, advertisements and all." That, she said, was the secret of her success. The Curtis organization paid strict attention to the format and presentation of ads. Curtis, Bok, and Lorimer supervised their writing; advertising manager John A. Thayer inaugurated the process of actually designing ads and selling them to advertisers.[53] But the real keynote was struck by Bok in 1896 when, probably mimicking newspapers again, he began the practice of "ad-stripping" or "tailing." In this format, the magazine cut up fiction and other features and ran them into columns in the back pages, thus drawing the reader's attention back to ads otherwise ignored.[54] Here was a literal implementation of the trend that Dunne, *The Nation*, and others satirized: Magazine articles now "advertised" for ads.

Here again, Curtis Publishing realized that it was not enough simply to have the readers' eyes directed at ads. The readers must also trust what they read—the second half of "confidence" in the *Journal*'s terms. Bok, for instance, later inaugurated a campaign against misleading patent medicine advertising—only, it should be noted, after readership polls supported his position. But even earlier, the *Journal*'s editors announced that there was "no room for swindlers in our family," and promised to reimburse any reader who reasonably felt cheated by an advertiser. In an editorial called "Confidence in our Columns," Mrs. Curtis summed up her overall intent:

> We intend to furnish the best practical and helpful domestic journal ever yet produced. . . . To do this we depend upon a good advertising patronage, and, to induce our subscribers to read and answer to the numerous and interesting announcements found in these columns each month, we *strive to secure their confidence* by inserting none but what we believe to be trustworthy and reliable. . . . We guarantee our subscribers against loss from any advertisement found in the *Journal*, and ask our readers, as a favor to us, to patronize our customers as often as possible, and *always* mention the *Journal* when writing. Don't forget that.[55]

This campaign against advertising irresponsibility is often taken as evidence of Bok's "reformer" status. But like Bruce Barton, Robert Lynd, and other apparent critics of consumerism, Bok's reformism only contributed to the long-term viability of consumer culture. In announcements like the one quoted above, the benefits of the guarantee to the *Journal* itself were tacitly acknowledged. First of all, advertisers could hardly find a better medium for their messages: The pledge not only "safeguarded" readers (if it did); by generating consumer confidence, it enhanced their willingness to buy. Ultimately, the reader was inclined to rely upon her "friend" and adviser, the *Journal*, to do the real scrutinizing. Secondly, the guarantee also helped to reinforce the adviser role of the *Journal* within its regular, non-advertising columns. Everyone belonged to the same family: reader, editor, writer, and advertiser. Here the consumer rhetoric doubled back upon itself: Once mimicking the language of the "well-managed store," the *Journal* now returned the favor and made buying a form of belonging.

IV

The topical magazines' rhetoric of practicality, "inside dope," and proprietorship came naturally to a status-conscious group of managerial "outsiders"; through the magazine, they imported this language to other quarters. We cannot precisely gauge how this new agenda was received by American readers. But I think we can legitimately infer an implied readership role that, beneath all the bluster about "activity" and "intimacy," described more accurately the kind of reading the magazines offered. One might say the new magazines were a bit like Coney Island. On the surface they enticed the reader with a flair for the exotic, with a sense of escape from the sterility of Victorianism, with the excitement of change; in the words of the historian John Kasson, they seemed "charged with a magical power to transmute customary appearances into fluid new possibilities." But like their amusement park counterpart, underneath lurked the "reality of control," a world of manipulated responses and "pageants" that invited passivity and anomie.[56]

The engineered "realism" of the topical magazines threatened to deepen the passivity of the reader in several senses. In the main, it tended to encourage the idea that "real life" was beyond the pale of the reader's existence. Although Page, for instance, often spoke of the common or humble life, in fact the life he displayed was something remote from most people's lives—international, always progressing, always uplifting. The effect, therefore, was to create the feeling that *others* experienced the real—the sense that the reader, too, was an outsider looking in. Rather than being called upon to offer insight into the world's workings, the reader was first awed by its complexity and then counseled by "experts" ostensibly closer to the action. Instead of promoting participation, the magazines elevated "seeing"; instead of encouraging readers' criticism, the editors interpreted for them—told them simply to "stay informed." Even *McClure's*' whirlwind of vital

facts and documentary "feel" may have only mired the reader in spectatorship. Once editors realized that the appeal of exposure lay in "vital picturesqueness" rather than political ideology, muckraking by definition became a matter of style, a literary strategy rooted in the often vacuous process of stimulating and unveiling for its own sake—for the curiosity value of the operational aesthetic. If Barnumese invaded political analysis, the logical equation was that citizenship was akin to spectating. Even as these editors avoided advertising in their magazines, they reflected its logic in their editorial program: They marketed "being informed," like buying, as a glamorized product that only highlighted the gap between the reader's supposed ignorance and the power of those "in the know."[57]

One might object that the cracker-barrel feel of the *Post* and the *Ladies' Home Journal* seemed hardly glamorized. But as I have argued, the convertible strategy of "humanizing" was only the flip side of celebrity-making. Like Page and McClure, Bok and Lorimer's "family" offered a passive readership role; critics were right in calling the *Post* "homogenizing." Bending levels of power and privilege into a common humanity, the *Post* invited self-satisfaction in its readers by conveying the comforting message that bosses or political leaders were, despite their worldly experience, simply "regular fellows" like themselves. Bok's reassuring confidences, likewise, lumped advertisers, experts, editors, and readers into a commonality of interest, within which each could trust the other completely: The *Journal*, the reader was told, would do all the necessary weeding out of the unworthy. And just as the *Post* narrowed the reader's outlook to the tunnel vision of "safe and sane" upward mobility, the *Journal* introduced its own restrictions on the female reader's sphere. Mrs. Curtis's periodical had hardly been feminist, but it had retained the nineteenth-century faith that there was no single "woman's sphere"—in essence, that the management of the home qualified the woman for anything. But Bok wrote that "there are no two greater factors in human life to-day than woman and home. . . . Separate the two, and they become like two divided parts of a pair of scissors." Resisting suffrage all along, Bok longed for the days when womanhood was free of modern pressures, when "she sought not the ballot, because she intuitively knew it was not made for her hands." Bok's alternative programs—for civic beautification, for suburban home design, for moderate sex education—revealed that when he said he aimed at the woman who "did things," he meant "doing" in a circumscribed arena—to a large extent, one sanctioned and directed by the *Journal* itself.[58]

A passive readership role was implied even in the efforts of Page, McClure, Lorimer, and Bok to create a personable, colloquial, and "inviting" editorial voice. This idea clearly reflected a modern notion of

"personality" that saw the editorial presence as a "persona," or mask, to be manipulated to meet the reader's needs. "Appearances are deceitful, I know," Lorimer's self-made merchant admits, "but so long as they are, there's nothing like having them deceive for us instead of against us."[59] Again, this was a motive derived essentially from the salesman's pitch. Yet in Lorimer's advice that the key was to make others' "inferiority" look like "equality," or Frank Munsey's allusion to the reader's "blood," or Bok's remarks about "vital needs," can be found the seeds of the elitist notion—later visible in market research, in certain branches of social science, or in political campaign packaging—that the consumer is an easily manipulated, irrational creature of "attitudes," hardly worthy of true intellectual exchange. Evaluating his career in *Twice Thirty* (1927), a memoir that his family reportedly recognized as "more like Edward," Bok's true feelings emerged:

> It was simply not a work which from its very character I would have chosen to express my real self. There are undoubtedly acute problems which concern themselves with the proper ingredients in cooking recipes, the correct stitch in crocheting or knitting, the most desirable and daintiest kinds of lingerie, and the momentous question whether a skirt should escape the ground by six or eight inches. These are vital points in the lives of thousands of women, and their widest solutions should be given by the best authorities. But is it too much to say that they are hardly of a nature to develop and satisfy the mental and spiritual nature of man? At least, not for a lifetime.[60]

Here, Bok's program was revealed to have all the intimacy of "Dialing for Dollars."

Finally, for all of their efforts to streamline and manage the reading process, the magazines may have also generated a considerable amount of anomie. Not only was a single magazine often a matter of conflicting signals; one can imagine the confusion of a reader who subscribed to more than one. The new emphasis on "practicality," for instance, contained an anti-intellectualism that undermined their reverence for expertise; their fascination for "inside dope," as in the muckraking vogue, often ran counter to their overall program of civic "uplift." Denigrating literature in favor of more "serious" concerns, editors then turned to marketing gossip. The magazines often subjected the reader to a baffling, ever changing cycle of "researched" needs, stimulated demand, and oversupply; of public image making and then exposure, "seriousness" and gossip, anxiety and then advice, making someone into a celebrity only to make him human again. Being "timely" meant always changing; being informed meant staying tuned; and both meant never being surfeited. A reader's needs and ignorance were constantly exposed, but "knowing" was always just out of reach—

one issue away. Born in the hit and run of the traveling salesman, the new rhetoric inherited and promoted the mode of planned obsolescence. The cumulative effect may have been to exacerbate the very perplexity, anxiety, and inattention these editors hoped to eradicate.[61]

These qualifications cast serious doubt upon the success of the cultural program the new magazine claimed to underwrite: the overthrow of the passive, sentimental ethos of Victorianism. If anything, these magazines suggest that the pitch to "practicality" and masculinity masked a deepening of consumer and citizen dependency—a deepening, a fragmenting, a proliferation of his supposed "needs." We might, in closing, consider the testimony of a lone reader who wrote to *The Atlantic* in 1906. Surveying the publicly acclaimed demise of sentimentalism, this female observer suggested that this era actually marked the onset of newer, more modern forms of victimization. She limited her remarks to the optimistic Woman's Page, which promised to change a "maid forlorn" into a "beautiful and engaging" princess; her message applied, however, to other departments.

> There are recipes for everything . . . my good is sought in a thousand ways; in columns of Don'ts; in pithy paragraphs of Useful Information; in exploitations of the fashions; in Health Talks and Beauty Hints. My good, I say, for there is in it all something so pointedly personal. . . . A pseudo-conscience calls me to its perusal from masterly leader or thrilling news-story; from high politics or current history.

Here, after all, was the pathos of the modern consumer: endlessly enticed and dissatisfied, reminded of one's shortcomings, set "free"—and yet guided by a "pseudo-conscience."

> The Woman's Page . . . pursues me, weighs me, and finds me wanting, without my invitation. . . . Quite against my will, I am spurred to the performance of imperative duties galore. . . . It is without my real privity and consent that I am goaded with precept and stirred to teasing ambition, that I am moved to the sinful storing of bits of alleged useful information, and am made uneasily aware of the latest collar and the newest style of hair-dressing—destined to change ere I can make them mine.[62]

There, perhaps, was the price exacted by the new "realism" later replicated in other cultural media: the endless prodding and stimulation of advertisers and experts, the manufactured "pep" of the modern thriller, the shallow intimacy of speakers "right in your living-room tonight."